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*Published in:*

Proceedings, 4th Annual Meeting of the Danish Society of Biomechanics, 26 October 2012, Aarhus, Denmark

*Publication date:*  
2012

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Ketabi, S., & Kersting, U. G. (2012). Micro-movements of the ankle joint during running acceleration: Effects on ground reaction forces, body kinematics and muscle activity. In *Proceedings, 4th Annual Meeting of the Danish Society of Biomechanics, 26 October 2012, Aarhus, Denmark* (pp. 15). Aarhus University.

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# Micro-movements of the ankle joint during running acceleration: Effects on ground reaction forces, body kinematics and muscle activity

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**Introduction:** Ground contact in running is always linked to a minimum amount of foot displacements on uneven surfaces or simply deformation of the ground including small amounts of slipping, i.e., in the early contact phase when horizontal forces are high compared to vertical forces. Various combinations of such micro movements are apparently possible with their implications not yet being investigated.

The purpose of this study was to assess the effects of small anteroposterior displacements, mediolateral inclinations and the combinations thereof on biomechanical and muscular parameters during accelerated running.

**Methods:** Four young and healthy subjects participated in the study (age: 23.4  $\pm$  2 years, height: 178  $\pm$  3 cm, weight: 75.4  $\pm$  3.4 kg). Subjects performed sprinting starts from a standing position with the 4th step on a movable force plate. The force plate slid backwards at foot contact with 3 different amplitudes (4, 6, 8 cm), two velocities without tilting or including an inversion or eversion movement ( $\pm$  3 deg) of the foot to simulate a total of nine different contact conditions.

Ground reaction forces (GRF) were collected by the moving force plate (AMTI OR6, USA) at 1000 Hz. Kinematic data were collected from 45 retroreflective markers placed on anatomical landmarks with a 8-camera motion capture system (Qualisys AB, Gothenburg, Sweden) at a sampling rate of 250 Hz.

Surface electromyography (EMG) was recorded in a bipolar fashion from rectus femoris (RF), biceps femoris (BF), Tibialis anterior (TA), Vastus Lateralis (VL), Vastus Intermedius (VI), Vastus Medialis (VM), soleus (SU), and Gastrocnemius (GA) on the perturbed limb (biovision, Germany).

The vertical and horizontal components of the GRF were extracted after compensation for inertia effects of the platform movement to calculate the angle of the GRF vector in the sagittal plane. Further, the center of pressure was calculated and the center of mass position was extracted from the kinematic data using a custom, full-body C-motion model (Visual 3D, USA).

EMG amplitudes and time of maximum activity were calculated after standard treatment of EMG data in a time window from 120 ms before touch-down to 250 ms after TD. Amplitudes were scaled to the maximum amplitude during the no-slip condition.

**Results and Discussion:** Only the largest slip amplitudes resulted in a notable change of center of mass trajectory or angle of GRF vector direction. However, all fast slip conditions showed increased muscle activities in the calf with changes being significant for larger slip amplitudes. Inversion in combination to slips further increased calf muscle activity.

**Conclusion:** Subtle slip episodes during the acceleration phase of running did not alter ground contact mechanics substantially. However, at larger amplitudes ( $\geq$  6 cm), especially in combination with inversion of the foot, lead to significant changes in muscle activity. Future research should focus on the functional implications of micro-movements on injury risk and performance.

**Acknowledgement:** The authors would like to acknowledge Forza AS for delivery of the footwear used during the testing.

